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Memorandum

Thomas Rudolphus Rooper

20<sup>th</sup> May 1903

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### In Memoriam.

ON the 20th of May, 1903, at his residence, 12, Cumberland Place, Southampton,

THOMAS GODOLPHIN ROOPER,

in whom the P.N.E.U. mourns a wise counsellor,  
an unsparing helper and a staunch friend.

The Parents' National Educational Union has sustained an immeasurable loss in the death of Mr. Thomas Godolphin Rooper. From the first inception of the Union he was with us. He was a member of the first committee, who, some sixteen years ago (in 1887), held many meetings in Bradford to discuss the ways and means of launching the P.N.E.U.: at that time he went straight to the principles of the Union, and embraced them with great warmth and insight.

His power of appreciation, in the fullest sense of the word, the outcome of a fine and highly cultivated mind, of wide reading and a wide knowledge of affairs, enabled him to weigh delicately and justly the possibilities and performances of the Union. He considered, for example, "That the Parents' Union is the most important society for stimulating discussion" (on educational matters). Also, I believe he thought that in proportion as parents brought themselves to take an active part in educational thought and educational schemes would schools become altogether living and serviceable. The discriminating quality, which enabled Mr. Rooper to appreciate justly and hope steadfastly both as



regards the P.N.E.U. and an immense number of other educational efforts and outputs, made him also a keen critic. All who worked with him had the assurance that if there were a defect he would see it and would help to mend it.

In the matters of encouragement and of just criticism his value appears to have been profoundly felt both by the Board of Education, by other members of the Inspectorate, by the teachers in his district, and by many and curiously various educational bodies and associations. But we, of the P.N.E.U., seem to have worked a new vein in that so rich mind and generous nature. One would say that he had a singular power of self-effacement, except that there appeared to be no self to efface; "it is all in the day's work," he would say to his nurses when they sympathised with his weariness in the last sad days; and the saying was a key to his life: he appeared to find no necessity for self-expression or for self-advancement; the work, and he there to do it, appeared to limit his outlook. It is here, I think, the P.N.E.U. has reason to rejoice in having drawn from him some graceful and scholarly output of his cultivated mind. He probably would never have written for the sake of literary expression, but we have obtained from him from time to time lectures which make up two volumes of essays,\* marked by wisdom, literary charm and profound philosophic teaching. The secretary of a branch would invite him to lecture; he always appeared to think such an invitation an honour, and the address he wrote for the occasion, while touching on some question of the hour, would rifle his treasures of wisdom, scholarship and wide reading. The essay on *Reverence, or The Ideal in Education*, will occur to some of us; this sort of phrase we find in it:—"Without great thoughts there are no great deeds"; "the true spirit of patriotism is . . . such an appreciation of his country's greatness as leads a man to be humble, modest, ready to sacrifice himself as an insignificant portion for the good of the whole community." I must digress here, to notice how the sterling character of Mr. Rooper's thought proceeded from the fact that it was the outcome of his

\* *Home and School and Studies and Addresses* (Blackie).

life. "I feel like a soldier who has given his life for his country," he said smilingly towards the end; and it is curious how widely this fact has been recognized. It has been well said of him that "he died a martyr to the cause of education."

Another purely delightful essay is entitled *Lyonesse: Education at Home versus Education at a Public School*. "Lyonesse" is his name for the romantic land of public school life, buried beneath the waves of this troublesome world, but by no means forgotten; "Lyonesse," probably also, because Harrow, his school, was founded by one Lyon. Has anything more charming been written on this subject, revealing as it does the pieties and loyalties of the public school man, things which abide with him to the end? Indeed, one wonders if anywhere but in a great English public school and in one of our old universities could a character of such modesty, culture and capacity be produced as we have to lament in Mr. Rooper. He was a Balliol man, a fervent disciple of Jowett, to whom his loyalty was unbounded, and to him, perhaps, he partly owed his insight as regards the true issues of life. From him too, it may be, came his, shall we say, 'Balliol' way of leaving a question open—of stating both sides and every side. I think he hated dogmatism and declamation, and his quiet, tentative way of throwing out ideas and suggestions was apt to be misleading to audiences not on the look-out for Attic salt and philosophic acumen.

Probably an instructed reader of his essays might readily find in them the springs of thought and purpose which moved his life. Was Lord Collingwood his special hero? The essay on *His Theory and Practice of Education* is written with what appears to me the sympathy we feel for a *life* which has helped to make us what we are. Speaking of the three great admirals—Jervis, Nelson and Collingwood,—he says, "It is hardly possible even to speak of these three men without our language and thoughts rising to an elevation above the common and ordinary level of social intercourse." Surely in this sentence we have a key to the fighting ardour which brought about the untimely end we mourn. But then, Collingwood too was an educationalist: "It was his character and superior education, and study of education, and



its kindred study of occupation in daily life, which made possible to Collingwood such an unparalleled achievement" (to keep eight hundred men on the high seas for twenty-two months, and to keep them in health and happiness).

Indeed, what he says of Collingwood is so word for word the testimony those who knew him would bear of Mr. Rooper, that I cannot help quoting further:—"For it was not merely his ceaseless military (read educational) occupation that wore him out. His correspondence was immense, and so highly esteemed was his judgment that he was consulted from all quarters, and on all occasions, and on a great variety of questions. . . . He was, by nature and education, a man of cultivated and refined taste, and of great simplicity of character. He united great intellectual power with great amiability, and these two gifts are rarely united in a man. His occupations at home were reading, especially works on history, from which it was his habit to compose well-written abridgments. His recreations were drawing, and cultivating his garden at Morpeth. . . . 'My wits,' he writes, 'are ever at work to keep my people employed, both for health's sake and to save them from mischief. We have lately been making musical instruments, and have now a very good band. Every moonlight night the sailors dance, and there seems as much mirth and festivity as if we were in Wapping itself.'

"Lord Collingwood was a saint, but he was a human, not a Puritan. Occupation of the right kind was the key-note of his educational system, and it seems the safest and most practical for all engaged in education."

In this essay on Lord Collingwood we get several keys to Mr. Rooper's own life. For instance, the wide reading, especially in works of history, the love of a garden, and above all the stress laid on occupation in daily life. The National Handwork Union found in him a staunch supporter, as did its publication, *Hand and Eye*. He delighted to turn out a perfect wooden spoon on his Sloyd bench, and was most keen to learn leather work by watching the students at the House of Education. His zealous work in connection with school gardens, and his *Report* on Continental school gardens are well known.

We get another touch of Mr. Rooper's genial wisdom, and of his many-sided character, in his charming essay on "Gaiety in Education," and still another in his essay on "Don Quixote"; and in his praise of chivalry, even reckless chivalry, a further peep into the moving springs of a life is afforded to us.

One more essay I must mention, which he sent for publication in the *Parents' Review* a few weeks before the end, on *Robinson Crusoe in Education*. No other writer that I know of has seen in this delightful tale another *Pilgrim's Progress*:—"But the island hermit is not alone in the spirit. He had thoughts which led him, now undisturbed by the slow stain of the world, to a more elevated frame of mind than he could find in society.

"Knowledge and truth and virtue were his theme, and thoughts the most dear to him were lofty hopes of Divine liberty.

"Robinson Crusoe saves from the wreck a Bible, which his sad life on the island leads him to appreciate. Just as Defoe describes his hero as cut off from social and political life, so he thinks of him as free from ecclesiastical controversy. As Crusoe bit by bit fights Nature and subdues her, so his spirit wins her way to religion by aid of the Bible without human intervention. . . . If you overlook this passage you cannot understand the drift of Robinson Crusoe." Here we get a glimpse into a region of thought which the writer was apt to keep jealously guarded. He abhorred cant—educational, social, religious; but those who knew him best, that is, those who were continually about him, knew that he, too, like Collingwood, was "a saint."

Delightful as these lectures were to his audiences, the lecturer found perhaps an equal pleasure in giving them. On his annual visits to the College at Ambleside, Mr. Rooper had always 'gleeful'—there is no other word—reminiscences of P.N.E.U. meetings which he had addressed at various places. He was incapable of pettiness or ungentle criticism, and whether his audiences were small and dull, large and intellectual, or large and fashionable, he always seemed to take the same gleeful delight that *such* an audience (of whichever sort) should gather for the consideration of



an educational topic. Indeed, the P.N.E.U. was always a fresh wonder to him, an extraordinary realisation of the ideal. Perhaps the same sense of gratulation, almost self-gratulation, was shown in the news he brought of students whom he had found at work here and there; in their work, too, he seemed to find the element of surprise that comes upon us in the realisation of the ideal. "Hope" says Dante, "is the mark of all the souls whom God has made His friends"; and he projected, as it were, without words, hope, confidence, aspiration and humility into the young people whose work he came to criticise.

Mr. Rooper was by no means lavish of praise, and was almost austere in criticism, but the students felt, rather than heard, that their spirit was congenial to him, and their work satisfactory. His thoroughness was remarkable: he would begin at about 8.30 and go on till 10 o'clock without pause—hear each of the mistresses lecture and each of the second year's students give a lesson chosen from three sets of notes. The charming thing, to both mistresses and students, was his keen, enquiring, and personal interest in the subject taught. He had a way of leaving the household more in love with knowledge than before; now galls, now weaving, now local geography would excite his curious interest; now a passage in a French or German author, now Italian or Mathematics, but he had always the happy way of making a teacher feel, whether her class were making buns or working problems, that the subject was excessively interesting in itself and for itself. We were all struck by an instance of his thoroughness, two or three years ago. The notes of lessons presented for his choice by the students have always covered an unusually wide range of subjects, in languages, handicrafts, art, science and what not, but it occurred to him that he had not heard them give piano lessons, and piano lessons were crowded into the busy day. In the afternoon he would examine the various handicrafts of the students with keen interest and knowledge; then there were drills to be seen, various books to be looked at, and in the evening the students generally entertained themselves and him with some sort of impromptu acting—now and then, a charade in which that awful personage, the Inspector, would see himself taken off with rather graceful

audacity. It was good to see his gleeful amusement on these occasions.

He knew people and affairs everywhere, and so was often able to have a good deal of conversation with the students on matters they knew; and certainly he took pleasure in contact with women who were preparing for that great work of education which he had so deeply at heart; their enthusiasm and their simple manners pleased him. For their part, the students held their Inspector in great reverence as well as cordial regard: they saw that he knew and that he cared. Once or twice in his generous zeal for education he came to us, I believe at great inconvenience, to give lessons before the students on subjects in which he knew he could help them. On one of these occasions, a student was giving a rather dull history lesson before him; he took up the subject, and such an unfolding of associations, graphic pictures, living interests, perhaps we had none of us heard before. This lesson was hardly a model, for I think there are few persons in the country who could have opened such a storehouse.

He used to cause a good deal of entertainment at table by referring with gravity to the time "when I was a governess." He really had, after he left college, undertaken the children of his friends, Dr. and Mrs. Butler, during some interregnum, an experience which he greatly enjoyed; and that and his five years' tutorship of the present Duke of Bedford gave him a special interest in the education of children brought up at home, and therefore in the work of the House of Education.

It is difficult to speak of Mr. Rooper's delightful and stimulating conversation, and of his genial interest in everything. We have lost a great man; and at a moment apparently when his achievements, his gifts and his knowledge should have been of special value to the nation he served. "To me, personally, the loss is irreparable," writes one of his many friends; and perhaps seldom have such sorrowful words found a wider echo. I do not venture to speak of the sorrow of the ladies, his sisters, a sorrow with which many sympathize; his extraordinary devotion as a brother is well known. But to all who mourn him



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he has left, not only the legacy of his life amongst us, but of three sayings, spoken when he was very near the end: "hope"; then, after a long interval, "press forward"; and later, "help from Him." Whether spoken consciously to his sisters, or unconsciously, the messages are those of his life. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." May we of the P.N.E.U. "hope," "press forward," \* and look for "help from Him."

C. M. MASON.

[From "*The Parents' Review*."]

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\* In this connection we cannot help quoting a few phrases from *The Grammarian's Funeral*, with the motto *Great Men do mean what they say*, by Mr. Rooper (*Parents' Review*, June, 1902) —

"His whole life was a long ascent, in the course of which there was no level ground."

"He lived to magnify the mind."

"Left play for work, grappled with the world, bent on escaping the common life."

"He had laid out his plan for his life-time."

"A great work will require a life-time, and its payment will never be received this side the grave."

So let us,—

"Leave him still loftier than the world suspects,  
Living and dying."